Flourish

ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS
VICTORIA

SUPPORTER NEWS
SPRING 2026

ISSUE 23

The ‘Paint House’
Conservation Project

Raising Rarity Program

Sensory Garden Refurbishment

Apprenticeship Program



Royal
Botanic
Gardens
Victoria



This magazine is 100% recyclable.
Printed on ecoStar, made from 100%
post–consumer recycled fibre, and
FSC® Recycled certified.

Design by Nature





A Rare and Royal Planting

Penny Fowler AM *Chair* and Chris Russell *Director and Chief Executive* warmly welcomed *Deputy Ambassador, Royal Danish Embassy Australia,* Flemming Andersen to plant the Huon Pine that was presented to Their Majesties King Frederik and Queen Mary of Denmark earlier this year.

A remarkable species endemic to lutruwita/Tasmania, the Huon Pine is one of Australia's oldest and most significant trees, with some individuals living up to 3,000 years and growing as little as 1mm each year. Now threatened in the wild, the tree holds particular significance given Queen Mary's Tasmanian origins. The specimen was generously donated by nursery growers Chris and Gisela Dicker, who attended the planting along with other special guests. The Huon Pine now happily resides within Fern Gully, the first of its kind at Melbourne Gardens, a meaningful symbol of global conservation and connection. •

Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work and learn and pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

↑ Penny Fowler AM *Chair* and Chris Russell *Director and Chief Executive* with *Deputy Ambassador* Flemming Andersen.



Welcome to Spring Flourish

Dear supporters,

What a beautiful time of the year. The footy is over for another season (a great relief to some, I'm sure!), and the smell of cut grass and blossom pervades our longer days. Melbourne and Cranbourne Gardens are bursting with colour, and the much–loved Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden has reopened following its winter refresh, ready for families to enjoy throughout the warmer months.

In this issue of Flourish, we celebrate just a handful of the many Gardens' projects and the passionate and inspiring people they have impacted. From the enthusiastic conservation efforts of Raising Rarity student Matilda to the outstanding work Lottie and Elaine are achieving through our Apprenticeship Program, these pathways for sharing knowledge and experience of biodiversity conservation are vital and are only made possible through the care and consideration of our supporters. It's because of you and your belief in what we do, that we can continue to make the Gardens a place of wonder and learning for many more years to come

We share with you stories of loss, treasured memories and moments of renewal within our Garden's gates. Our neighbour of 50 years, Jan Ryan, whose appreciation for our landscapes stems from a deep connection to place and plants. The Morey family who, through unimaginable loss, have chosen to support the rejuvenation of the Bamboo Forest in the Sensory Garden in honour of their boys and their passion for plants.

It was such a pleasure to host so many of our generous supporters at this year's *Lightscape* Preview Event. Thank you to those who joined us for the spectacular occasion. This year's trail showcased installations that highlight the deep knowledge of First Peoples, the beauty of the Gardens' plant collections and the critical conservation work of our science and horticulture teams. I am incredibly proud of *Lightscape's* continued success, including receiving the Gold Award in the Major Festivals and Events category at the Victorian Tourism Awards last year, for the second year running. This recognition reflects the magic experienced by our audiences and the extraordinary creativity and commitment of the team who bring *Lightscape* to life.

I encourage you to take a stroll, plan that picnic or book a tour at either of our Gardens, and make the most of the season with those closest and dearest to you. Thank you for your support, it allows us to open our gates wider, to dream bigger, and to continue being a place where nature and people grow together.

I look forward to seeing you in the Gardens.



Chris Russell
Director and Chief Executive,
Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria

SUPPORTER SPOTLIGHT

Jan Ryan and a Lifetime of Stories in the Gardens



For close to 50 years, Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne has been the backdrop to Jan Ryan's full and verdant life. From schooling at Melbourne Girls Grammar to moving into the area in the 1980s and starting her family, Jan feels a deep connection to place within the Gardens.

"There is a giant Moreton Bay Fig that I used to visit as a little girl with a hollow space at its centre. I'd daydream that if I ever got locked in the Gardens, this is the safe space I would curl up to sleep in. The magic of this place never leaves you."

Jan Ryan

Jan's delight and care for the Gardens emanates through the stories she recalls with warmth and humour. Jan and her late husband, Bill Ryan, would walk through the Gardens most mornings, noting locations of noxious weeds and gently alerting the gardeners.

Jan and Bill weren't the only members of their family who connected with the Gardens. She remembers with a squirm the menagerie of living (and decaying) objects her three inquisitive boys would bring home after hours spent exploring down by Ornamental Lake.

Some of her stories are as historical as they are personal. Jan fondly recalls meeting a majestic figure in the Gardens at the impressionable age of six. "When I was very young, I attended a tree planting on the Oak Lawn with Queen Salote of Tonga. There was even a photo in The Age!" she beams. Jan's own garden tells a story rich in Australian landscape design lore. Originally designed by Edna Walling for the Singleton family, who lived in the home till the 1950s, the garden is one of the few Walling designed for 'close friends'.

Respect for the plant world and its wonders is still felt in Jan's garden today. "My mother was a prolific gardener. I recall her allowing me a little patch of our garden in Elwood to make my own when I was around five years old," shares Jan. Her lifelong affection for plants is evident in the attentive care for her grandfather's orchids, along with the addition of a large Bird's Nest Fern which sits in a shaded spot beside an impressive native frangipani tree.

Jan's connection to the Gardens also stems from her aunt Ivy Sears, who was a talented landscape photographer during a time when women weren't publicly acknowledged for their work. Jan's copy of *In the Botanic Gardens Melbourne* by Frank Clarke is bookmarked and lovingly referenced. Published in 1924, her aunt's large format photographs fill the pages of the popular handbook on Melbourne Gardens.

Today, Jan is a proud Director's Circle supporter of the Gardens. She cherishes her walks through the Gardens and getting to learn from botanists and our industry experts. "I love noticing the small changes and the decisions made by the team to care for the plants and their longevity," says Jan. "Bill and I planted hundreds of Manna Gums on our property, and none of them look as straight and lush as the one on Southern Lawn!"

When asked why she chooses to support the Gardens, Jan says, "I don't think people realise the immense expense and energy it takes to keep this place open. I recall when the previous government wanted to ticket entry to the Gardens. That went down like a lead pipe!"

Jan and her dear friend and neighbour Margaret Plowright accredit their longevity in life to the fresh air and scenic walks in the Gardens. "We really are so lucky to live in this area. It was a different place when we first moved in, a little shady in areas," smiles Jan. "My husband saw the potential in our home, and I'm so grateful to benefit from this bustling inner–city oasis at our front door." •

Jan in conversation with Alastair Robinson *Manager Biodiversity Services.*

Restoring Melbourne's Oldest Operating Workshop

Hidden within Royal Botanic Gardens Melbourne is one of the city's oldest continuously operating workshops, the Melbourne Gardens’ Sign Workshop, also known as the 'Paint House’. Dating from approximately 1863, the modest weatherboard building has quietly served the Gardens for more than 160 years, producing hand–crafted plant labels and interpretive signage that has connected visitors to our living botanical collections.

Ever since its construction, the Sign Workshop has been home to the Garden's signwriters, most recently Maggie McNamara, who retired in 2025 after 41 years of service. The Workshop has housed an extraordinary collection of historic plant labels, hand–painted signs and sign–making equipment that document decades of changing horticultural practice, graphic design and interpretive storytelling at the Gardens. The collection reflects the evolution of Melbourne Gardens and highlights the important role clear, scientifically accurate plant identification has played in botanic gardens for generations.

In recent years, structural deterioration has threatened the historic fabric of the workshop and its ongoing use. The initial phase of the ‘Paint House’ Conservation Project has been realised through vital funding from the Copland Foundation to preserve this unique piece of Melbourne's horticultural and design heritage. The Copland Foundation’s generous support has allowed the team to replace the workshop’s stumps, timber floor and framing and see to extensive weatherboard repairs.

The Placemaking and Interpretation Team, led by Sally McPhee, has earned national recognition for excellence in wayfinding, demonstrating how thoughtful signage remains central to the ways visitors navigate and experience the Gardens today. "Decanting the Sign Workshop really brought home the significance of signage design and fabrication in the story of the Gardens.” shares Sally. ‘We counted over 1000 individual pieces of signage, representing sign fabrication methodologies through the years: stencils, metal hand painted plant labels; hand painted timber plant labels and shields, and anodised aluminium plant labels in the Gedakop system”.

The ongoing restoration project celebrates traditional signwriting and contemporary design practice at play in the Gardens, creating exciting opportunities for education, research, and specialist tours. Now the building has been stabilised, future conservation project stages will focus on roof maintenance to effectively weather seal the building, as well as enhanced storage and the curation of this unique collection.

The ‘Paint House’ Conservation Project is safeguarding far more than a historic building. It is protecting a living tradition of craftsmanship, which supports the ongoing interpretation of our landscape projects and botanical collections while creating opportunities for future generations to engage with this unique intersection of horticulture, heritage, science and design. The Gardens’ cultural legacy is reflected in the project, honouring the past and ensuring this remarkable workshop continues to serve the community well into the future. •

A snippet of the collection of heritage signs at the ‘Paint Shop’ prior to the project commencing.



"Some information on sign provenance is known, but a fascinating project exists for researching, documenting and cataloguing – and one day sharing – this rich design history."

Sally McPhee, *Creative Producer Placemaking & Interpretation*



Lightscape 2026, An Immersive Botanical Experience

On a clear, crisp June evening we had the pleasure of hosting our supporter community for a preview of *Lightscape 2026*. Guests were invited into the warmth of The Observatory Café to enjoy a selection of canapes and drinks. Excitement was high as Jason Hay *Deputy Board Chair* and Chris Russell *Director & Chief Executive* spoke to the success of the past four years of *Lightscape* at Melbourne Gardens.

Following the event, guests were granted special access to this year's mesmerising trail —a celebration of winter in nature— beautifully imagined by First Peoples, Australian and international artists. The evening was a joyful celebration of immersive storytelling, highlighting the Gardens' scientific, cultural, and environmental impacts.

This memorable event was a chance for the team to thank our generous donors and supporters for their contributions over the year. •





Sandra Ivory and Sue Hill.

Kath, Millie, Ella, Liv and Justin Nunan.







↑ Yash Desai, Nicole Butera and Sia Desai.

↑ Rosemary Cotter and Russell Wanklyn.

← Bradman, Jenny, Isabella and Anton Gaudry.

↓ Belinda Lawson, Farren and Imogen Williams, and Susan Bannerman.



SONY MUSIC

Supported by red energy

Inspiring Young Conservationists



Matilda Wallace is the Raising Rarity Program's unofficial Youth Ambassador. At 14, Matilda already has her heart set on a career in plant conservation. She originally participated in the Raising Rarity pilot program at her primary school in Gippsland and has been a passionate advocate for bringing the program to her high school, Maffra Secondary College.

"I plan on fitting this into my dream career as a graphic ecologist, that's someone who illustrates plants as a reference when trying to locate species in the wild."

Matilda Wallace

Scan to read more about Matilda.

Raising Rarity is a unique plant conservation program run by the Gardens' Learning and Community Engagement team, encouraging school students to develop horticulture skills while increasing awareness of Victoria's native flora. Throughout the year–long program, students learn to grow, monitor and eventually collect seed from rare and threatened plant species. The precious seeds are then sent to the Victorian Conservation Seedbank for long–term storage and research.

In the two years she participated in the program at primary school, Matilda cherished the opportunity to observe the life cycle of *Craspedia canens* (Grey Billy–Buttons) and actively care for the plants each week. "The most exciting part is watching them grow and develop into a beautiful flower, then getting to catch the seed in the little bags and hand them over to the Seedbank," she says. "It all felt really special."

Alongside the seed collection, students contribute valuable citizen–science data, which helps inform conservation management and recovery strategies for some of the state's most threatened plant species. "I was so surprised to learn that there is only one wild population of the Billy–Button between my hometown and the Royal Botanic Gardens," says Matilda. "Which is really upsetting, and something has to be done about it."

This year Matilda is looking forward to delving deeper into the scientific techniques behind the caretaking of the plants.

Matilda's interest in protecting plants and the environment stems from her grandfather's research on native orchids with Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria. That passion has been nourished through her involvement in Raising Rarity–run plant surveys. "It teaches students about a whole new career path that they just didn't know existed," shares Matilda.

Over the past few months, Matilda and her mum Jade have joined Meg Hirst *Research Scientist* and others from the Raising Rarity team on conservation fieldtrips, first to Raymond Island to translocate *Caladenia valida* (Robust Spider–orchid) and then to Smith's Gully working with *Caladenia rosella* (Rosella Spider Orchid). Matilda volunteered alongside orchid experts, field naturalists and rangers from Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Aboriginal Corporation giving her a wonderful overview of plant science in action. "Matilda immersed herself immediately," beams Meg. "She assisted with measuring orchid tubers, recording data, planting orchids and installing protective cages over the plantings to safeguard from predators."

These genuine hands–on experiences greatly impact students' wellbeing and understanding of the natural world. "Watching young people gain confidence, develop new skills and realise they can contribute to the protection of threatened species is incredibly rewarding," shares Tash van Velzen *Raising Rarity Outreach Officer.*

Over the past year, the demand for the program has flourished. "We've had enquiries from Mildura through to Mallacoota, across nearly every bioregion in Victoria," explains Tash. Through the support of the Ian and Shirley Norman Foundation, the team have been able to create greater impact with stronger resources to support their work, reaching students who may have otherwise gone without these experiences. By sharing expertise and collective knowledge with students in a fun and accessible way, Raising Rarity is fostering a generation of young Victorians who not only appreciate biodiversity but are committed to actively protecting it. •

Matilda inspecting an orchid specimen during a recent fieldtrip with the Raising Rarity team.

A Story of Loss, Rejuvenation and Passion for Nature

The Sensory Garden is a pocket of Melbourne Gardens designed for quiet reflection and exploration. Built around the five senses and tactile plant experiences, it is an immersive space for celebrating the vivid displays of colour, sounds and activity of a thriving garden. The space's recent refurbishment, which reinterpreted the bamboo forest into an emblemised cathedral form, resonated deeply with the Morey family after they tragically lost both their sons in 2024.

Melbourne Gardens have always been a place of importance for the Morey family. Sam and Jeremy, along with their sister, Zara, spent many memorable moments there growing up, visiting the Ian Potter Foundation Children's Garden and picnicking on the lawns. The landscapes offered them a connection to place, one that greatly influenced a love of nature and plants in both Sam and Jeremy well into adulthood. Their parents, Kay and Phil Morey, approached the Gardens about meaningful ways to remember their boys in a place that had always felt special to their family.

Across the Sensory Garden's immersive planting, from the persimmons to the lotus, each of the hero plants have a natural life cycle. As the bamboo flowered and the towering mass of reeds began to fall, this section of the Garden needed a new interpretation. Long–term collaborators Andrew Laidlaw *Landscape Architect* and David Wong *Nature Artist* envisioned a whimsical design to repurpose the remaining dried reeds into an arched walkway.

"The structure has been shaped to mimic the play of light and shadow, and rich texture that is experienced in a bamboo forest," shares Andrew Laidlaw. The team explored weaving techniques and introduced additional seating along the walkway to create a space that feels secluded whilst connected to the surrounding design.

Kay, Phil and Zara felt an emotional and physical pull to the project, recalling a photo taken when the kids were young, happily swinging between the towering bamboo in the Children's Garden. They made the generous decision to fund the refurbishment in honour of Sam and Jeremy.

The Morey's joined the Horticulture team, led by Stephanie Brodel *Horticulturist*, and Yvonne Lai *Donor Care Coordinator* for a series of planting days over the course of the project. Friends and family were invited to join in revegetating the area, a cathartic exercise during a time of immense grief. David designed mosaics imbued with the family's memories. Young running bamboo plants and vines were included in the planting plan. Symbolising regeneration and new beginnings, they will grow up to cover the previous reeds that have been carefully shaped to meet over the bluestone pathway.

Through unimaginable loss and heartache, the Sensory Garden has offered a space for the Morey's and those who knew and loved the boys to sit, reflect and pay tribute to life and all the growing beauty that surrounds it. •

"We are incredibly grateful to everyone who connected with us and contributed their time, creativity and care to bring this special place to life, in honour of Sam and Jez."

Kay, Phil and Zara Morey



Kay, Zara and Phil Morey in the Sensory Garden.



The afternoon light peeping through the new growth surrounding the Bamboo Arbour at Sensory Garden.

Supporting Budding Minds and Tree-top Story Tellers at the Gardens

Over the past year, Elaine Bautista *Trainee Arborist* and Charlotte Stone *Apprentice Horticulturist* have bonded through shared experiences in the Gardens' Apprenticeship Program. The program builds skills and knowledge in the next generation of environmentalists, connecting emerging horticulturists and arborists with our world-leading team of experts.

Elaine's love and knowledge of plants have been growing for some time. A solo trip bikepacking across New Zealand and Vietnam stirred her desire to shift gear and enter a workforce that provided stimulus and challenges. "Trees always felt daunting to learn about. I really wanted to deconstruct this and not be afraid," says Elaine. When she saw the opportunity to apply for the Arboriculture Traineeship at the Gardens, she dived into the role. "I thought to myself, 'I can do this, I'm a climber, I have strong endurance!'" she laughs.

One of Elaine's favourite trees is the *Agathis robusta* (Queensland kauri). "From the moment I learnt its name, I knew I needed to climb this tree. They are so stately and graceful," she says. Working with *Lightscape* contractors, Elaine was climbing an *Agathis robusta* near Gardens House, only to get a call partway through the job to help on another tree. Before she knew it, she was 30 metres up in an even larger *Agathis*. "It was certainly a pinch-me moment, the view was stunning. My fear was high, but it pushed me beyond my limit. I feel excited about what trees I can take on next."

Before applying for the Horticulture Apprenticeship Program, Lottie was working through a PhD in Environmental Humanities. She was spurred on by a sense of restlessness, writing about the environment when she wanted to be in it. Early in her apprenticeship, Lottie developed an interest in Bryophytes, non-vascular plants (mosses, liverworts and hornworts), that evolved from algae as the earliest plant life on Earth. They caught Lottie's attention for the diversity of environments in which they can be found, their role as soil erosion preventers, and their amazing microhabitats. "I've been able to develop a collection of close to 20 species," she shares. "We managed to wild-collect *Dawsonia superba* (Giant moss). It's now planted in a few spots in Fern Gully, alive, and growing well!"

Lottie's enthusiasm evolved into a mentorship with Daniel Ohlsen *Flora Botanist,* based in the Herbarium. "It's been really fulfilling to contribute to Daniel's conservation work by propagating these species to help with spore collection," says Lottie. "I'm so grateful for my managers' openness and encouragement to allow me time to invest in this particular interest".

The Apprenticeship Program has opened Lottie's eyes to future career pathways. Over three years of placement, she will have rotated across the North, Central, and South sections of Melbourne Gardens, providing opportunities to learn from different team leaders and experts in the field. "The wealth of knowledge the staff hold here is incredible," she says. "It's equally

"It's been incredible, and so rare to have the experience of working closely with a botanist. I never thought I'd be starting a horticulture apprenticeship and getting to create a whole new plant collection."

Charlotte Stone, *Apprentice Horticulturalist*

"You gain such specialist knowledge interacting with the trees every day. If you don't have those constant eyes over the seasons, you lose the history of the trees, and the stories they hold."

Elaine Bautista, *Trainee Arborist*

as important and fulfilling for them to be able to pass that on." Elaine agrees, "There's so much value in the team's willingness to share, adapt and take on suggestions and new approaches." What results is a fusion of ideas and techniques to help improve best-practice horticultural and conservation approaches in the Gardens and beyond.

Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria is one of only two botanic gardens in Australia that have a dedicated Arboriculture team. "I hope that we can remain a stronghold for an in-house arborist team. We need those story holders to be able to tell people why these trees matter in our environment," says Elaine. This handover and succession of knowledge is key for our Gardens' survival and the ongoing preservation of Victoria's fragile biodiversity. •

If you are interested in supporting the program, please reach out to Nicola Kaufman *Philanthropy Manager* on +61 3 9252 2713 or Nicola.Kaufman@rbg.vic.gov.au.





↑ Lottie in her element in the cool outskirts of the Fern Gully.

← Elaine, mid-climb, working on a *Eucalyptus camaldulensis* (River Red-gum) in the Cranbourne Bushlands.

Cranbourne Orchid Conservation Program



For the month of September, the orchid shade houses at Cranbourne Gardens are open to the public for a series of popular tours, captivating the hearts (and camera rolls) of visitors.

"They are fantastic, terrestrial orchids that grow on the ground, that come in amazing shapes, colours and sizes — we have some of the most interesting orchids in the world — as far as their unique associations to pollinators and mycorrhizal fungi."

Dr Noushka Reiter *Principal Scientist Conservation*

Victoria is home to 400 species of native orchids, half of which are threatened with extinction in the wild. Dr Noushka Reiter *Principal Scientist Conservation* and her team are on hand to share their world-class knowledge and the exceptional achievements of the Orchid Conservation Program with tour guests. The program highlights the team's focus on storing and propagating these threatened and rare endemic plants. It also showcases the efforts to reintroduce the orchids back into the wild so they will be around for the next generation to enjoy.

Australia has nearly 1800 orchid species that are endemic to the mainland and offshore islands, and the tour invites guests to see these endangered orchids up close. "212 species that were once common are either critically endangered or endangered. Essentially through habitat destruction, introduced animals and weeds, they are now at the pointy end of extinction," explains Noushka.

Orchids are reliant on mycorrhizal fungi for their nutrients, and particular species of pollinators need to be present for the habitat to be deemed suitable for re-homing. The program focuses on growing and planting these species back into the bush, creating new wild populations and reducing the risk of extinction. Donations received from and during the tours will contribute towards these vital conservation efforts.

"Last year, the rarest spider orchids essentially on the planet were on show. A lot of these species are down to a handful in the wild — the program focuses on growing these species and supplementing small populations in the wild," says Noushka.

This year the shade houses will open again to the public for a series of tours, offering a chance for visitors to catch a glimpse of these unique and endangered species. Ticketing of the tours helps to raise much needed funds towards the Gardens' Orchid Conservation Program. •



The critically endangered *Caladenia audasii* (Audas Spider-orchid) in bloom at Cranbourne Garden's shade houses.

A *Thelymitra mackibbinii* (Brilliant Sun-orchid) captured by Alastair Robinson in the Victorian Goldfields is a threatened species the program also supports.



For Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria to be the best possible custodians of our unique natural heritage, we need to continue to uncover plant knowledge and save the rarest Australian flora and fauna from extinction.

It is through the generosity of our donors that the Gardens continue our efforts in world-class science and horticultural research, landscape development and public programs.

Show your support today by making a fully tax-deductible donation.

YES, I would like to support the Garden's mission to see life enriched and sustained by plants.

Title First name

Last name

Address

State Postcode

Email

Phone

Date of birth

I will give $

via: (*please tick*)

☐ Cheque (*enclosed*) ☐ MasterCard

☐ Visa ☐ American Express

Card no.

__ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __ __

Expiry date __ __ / __ __ CVC __ __ __

Cardholder's name

Signature

☐ Please send me information about including a gift to the Gardens in my Will

☐ I have already included a gift to the Gardens in my Will

Please tear off and return to:
Private Bag 2000,
South Yarra Victoria 3141

To donate online, please visit:
rbg.vic.gov.au/support-us

All donations of $2 or more are tax deductible

"We love RBGV and the important work you are doing for conservation and green space."

Michelle Smith

"Thank you so much for the great work of the Gardens."

Rosemary O'Connor

"So glad to support your and our shared goals."

Linnett Turner

"We all need to look after our environment. Planting more of the right plants is essential, and raising awareness and education is crucial."

Karen Unkles

"I wish I could give more!"

Helen Kennedy

"Keep up the great work!"

Cody Hajnal



Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria

To support our work or learn more please contact us on:

03 9252 2383

philanthropy@rbg.vic.gov.au

ISSN – 2652 – 4325